

From: "Tobey Wilkins" <tobeyw@vikingbank.com> on 04/16/2004 12:20:08 PM
Subject: Economic Growth and Regulatory Paperwork Reduction Act of 1996 Review

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Dear Federal Reserve:

I am a Consumer Loan Officer at a fast-growing successful Community Bank headquartered in Seattle, Washington. We are slowly being crushed under the cumulative weight of regulatory burden, something that must be addressed by Congress and the regulatory agencies before it is too late. This is especially true for consumer protection lending rules, which though well intentioned, unnecessarily increase costs for consumers and prevent us from serving our customers. Unduly burdening service-oriented Community Banks is a disservice to Consumers.

An example is "Reg. Z" Finance Charges which I believe was intended to "level the playing field" for Consumers making financing choices an easy decision. Unfortunately, the calculation of "APR" is a murky process, handled in a variety of ways by various Lenders and only serves to confuse the Consumer. Simplification and Clarification are desperately needed in "APR" disclosure.

Equal Credit Opportunity Act (Federal Reserve Regulation B)

Regulation B creates a number of compliance problems and burdens for banks. Knowing when an application has taken place, for instance, is often difficult because the line between an inquiry and an application is not clearly defined.

Spousal Signature. Another problem is the issue of spousal signatures. The requirements make it difficult and almost require all parties - and their spouses - come into the bank personally to complete documents. This makes little sense as the world moves toward new technologies that do not require physical presence to apply for a loan.

Adverse Action Notices. Another problem is the adverse action notice. It would be preferable if banks could work with customers and offer them alternative loan products if they do not qualify for the type of loan for which they originally applied. However, that may then trigger requirements to supply adverse action notices. For example, it may be difficult to decide whether an application is truly incomplete or whether it can be considered "withdrawn." A straightforward rule on when an adverse action notice must be sent - that can easily be understood - should be developed.

Other Issues. Regulation B's requirements also complicate other instances of customer relations. For example, to offer special accounts for seniors, a bank is limited by restrictions in the regulation. And, most important, reconciling the regulation's requirements not to maintain information on the gender or race of a borrower and the need to maintain sufficient information to identify a customer under section 326 of the USA

PATRIOT Act is difficult and needs better regulatory guidance.

Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) (Federal Reserve Regulation C)

Exemptions. The HMDA requirements are the one area subject to the current comment period that does not provide specific protections for individual consumers. HMDA is primarily a data-collection and reporting requirement and therefore lends itself much more to a tiered regulatory requirement. The current exemption for banks with less than \$33 million in assets is far too low and should be increased to at least \$250 million.

Volume of Data. The volume of the data that must be collected and reported is clearly burdensome. Ironically, at a time when regulators are reviewing burden, the burden associated with HMDA data collection was only recently increased substantially. Consumer activists are constantly clamoring for additional data and the recent changes to the requirements acceded to their demands without a clear cost-benefit analysis. All consumers ultimately pay for the data collection and reporting in higher costs, and regulators should recognize that.

Certain data collection requirements are difficult to apply in practice.

Additional Comments

It would be much easier for banks, especially community banks that have limited resources, to comply with regulatory requirements if requirements were based on products and all rules that apply to a specific product were consolidated in one place. Second, regulators require banks to provide customers with understandable disclosures and yet do not hold themselves to the same standard in drafting regulations that can be easily understood by bankers. Finally, examiner training needs to be improved to ensure that regulatory requirements are properly - and uniformly - applied.

Conclusion

The volume of regulatory requirements facing the banking industry today presents a daunting task for any institution, but severely saps the resources of community banks. We need help immediately with this burden before it is too late. Community bankers are in close proximity to their customers, understand the special circumstances of the local community and provide a more responsive level of service than megabanks. However, community banks cannot continue to compete effectively and serve their customers and communities without some relief from the crushing burden of regulation. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Tobey R. Wilkins